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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000606

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [KWMN](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: SEX IN SAUDI ARABIA - CLOAK AND DAGGER DATING

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller, for reasons 1.4 (c) and (d).

#### A WINDOW INTO THE SAUDI SOCIAL SCENE

1. (U) Recently, Pol-Econoff spoke with a number of young men and women in Saudi Arabia. In one encounter, with a 29 year old man named Abdul, Pol-Econoff learned about the Saudi social scene. As both are roughly the same age, they began to speak about what guys that age tend to speak about, namely women and entertainment. Pol-Econoff had learned that Saudi Arabia is devoid of cinemas, dance clubs, bars, restaurants where unmarried/nonrelatives may sit together, dating, men and women talking in public, women being seen, etc. Going off of the assumption that people are people and that nature bows to no one, Pol-Econoff asked him what young people do for entertainment and dating. Abdul laughed and then proceeded to tell of the many different tried and true techniques for meeting members of the opposite sex and "hanging around."

PARTY LIKE ITS WEDNESDAY NIGHT (virtual Friday in Saudi Arabia)

2. (U) Regarding "chilling," this consists largely of, well, sitting around in homes, with friends. There aren't any places for regular young people to go, except for dinner at a restaurant, where the sexes are completely segregated. Abdul said that he and his buddies enjoy renting movies, which of course have been edited so as not to sully the minds of right-thinking Saudis with un-Islamic filth, such as a man and a woman kissing. Abdul was casually aware that films were edited, but as he was unaware of what he was missing, it did not upset him, a la "ignorance is bliss." Abdul mentioned that he and his friends go to restaurants and just stay around. They also frequent the many malls in Jeddah. At the mall, the men play a game, wherein they try to make out the female forms under the all-black abayas. All women cover their bodies. Most women cover their heads, and many women cover their faces as well. The men are not allowed to speak to the women, nor are they allowed to sit in the same section as them in the food court. Pol-Econoff personally witnessed security guards blow whistles and yell at men who sat in the 'family' section. The men were third country nationals who did not speak Arabic and could not read the Arabic-only sign declaring that said section was off-limits to them.

"IT IS A RISK"

13. (U) Abdul informed Pol-Econoff that if a woman looks pretty then one of the guys will look around to make sure that no security is present, and then he will run up to the woman to give her his telephone number. Abdul mentioned that many women are nice, but that some begin to yell for security and make a big scene. Some of Abdul's friends are banned from certain malls for such behavior. After hearing this, Pol-Econoff still wanted to know more. For example, how could a guy tell that a woman was pretty if he couldn't see her. Abdul responded by explaining that the goal of these encounters is to find a nice girl to converse with. Being an American male, Pol-Econoff reactively asked, "Well, how do you know if she's jamilla (pretty/attractive) or not?" His response, "You don't." Pol-Econoff followed up quickly with, "Why would you want to court a woman that you haven't seen? What if she's ugly?" Abdul's answer was simple and to the point, "It is a risk."

#### MEETING WOMEN SAUDI STYLE

14. (U) Pol-Econoff was intrigued by Abdul's story of meeting women in the mall, so he asked what other techniques Abdul had for a young lad new to the Saudi social scene. Abdul informed Pol-Econoff that women jog around a particular area on the Corniche in the evenings. He and many other Saudi men park their cars nearby and stare at the black abayas running by. Occasionally, the men will employ the same technique as in a mall. The men will look around, and satisfied that there is no security, they will run up to the woman and give her the cell. phone number (always the cell. phone number).

JEDDAH 00000606 002 OF 003

Apart from running up to women and "throwing numbers at them", in supermarkets Abdul explained that it was common for a man to walk by a woman and drop his number in her bag. Also, if he wants women to call him, he will place a 'for sale' sign on his car with his phone number prominently shown for any brave young woman to call him. Another strategy is to dial numbers at random and see if a friendly woman answers the phone. This can be very tricky, especially with caller ID. One young Saudi woman informed Pol-Econoff that this strategy was "out-dated. Thankfully we have Bluetooth."

#### FORBIDDEN LOVE

15. (U) The most exciting part of the conversation was when Abdul began to explain the cloak-and-dagger techniques used to date, or carry on a courtship. He was very proud of the fact that he had a girlfriend. He whispered it to Pol-Econoff, and then quickly went through his cell. phone and produced a picture of her. With a smile on his face he began telling of how they met through his sister. He then got sad and confessed that he has asked her father for her hand in marriage twice, but both times he has been rebuffed because he is not a Saudi citizen and her father does not believe that Abdul can give her a good life. This didn't quite register so Pol-Econoff asked him if he was Muslim, he answered in the affirmative, then Pol-Econoff followed up, asking if he had been to jail or was divorced. He answered "No, nothing, I'm just not Saudi." Like so many other men, born and raised in Saudi Arabia, he does not have Saudi citizenship, he is Yemeni. Jeddah is the only city that he knows, but as his parents arrived in Jeddah from Yemen without citizenship, he does not have it either.

#### UNDERCOVER LOVERS

16. (U) This part was sad, but Pol-Econoff still wanted to know more so he inquired about how Abdul and his beloved dated. Pol-Econoff asked Abdul if they spent time at his house since they are unable to visit his girlfriend's. He said quickly that he could not bring his sadiqa (girlfriend) to his house since he lived with his parents and they would

never approve. Finally, he began to explain how he and his girlfriend are conducting this undercover and forbidden courtship. Abdul informed Pol-Econoff that he and his girlfriend spend most of their time together in his parent's SUV. "The windows are tinted and we talk for hours without anybody bothering us," he said. "Yea..talking for hours...rrriiigghhtt...", Pol-Econoff replied. "No really, wa-la-hee (I swear), we just talk. Well sometimes we do things, but nothing bad," Abdul said.

#### BLUETOOTH MANIA

17. (U) At this point, Pol-Econoff began to feel bad for the guy. He seemed like a nice guy, in his late twenties, who just wanted to have a girlfriend to be with. He told of how they use Bluetooth technology, as do many of his friends, to communicate. The two can't go to restaurants together because somebody might see them and then they would both be in trouble, especially her. Both of their families are very conservative and would never approve of the two of them alone together, even in a restaurant. "Sometimes we go to McDonalds and we sit at different tables and communicate with bluetooth or we whisper when we pass by each other," he confided. Pol-Econoff asked him if he ever considered putting on an abaya and covering his face so that the two could be together without worry, but Abdul was not very receptive to this idea.

#### THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS

18. (U) As in any country, dating habits depend upon means and socio-economic status. Saudi Arabia is no different. Two Syrians gave Pol-Econoff two very different stories about dating life in Saudi Arabia. One confirmed the restricted life that a Yemeni and two Indians shared with Pol-Econoff; very similar to the situation that Abdul faces. The other spoke of the great freedom on resorts and housing compounds in the Kingdom. The second Syrian was rather well-off and he explained how those young people with more means, who have

JEDDAH 00000606 003 OF 003

benefited from traveling out of Saudi Arabia, are frustrated and restless in the country. The life that he proceeded to describe to Pol-Econoff was very similar to life in the United States or any other western country. Similarly, a young unmarried Saudi woman in her early thirties spoke of the restlessness felt by Saudi women regarding dating, but she, like many others like her, retreat to the numerous western-style resorts and compounds where the upper-crust live. One Saudi woman told me of the prevalence of alcohol, which is strictly forbidden in Saudi Arabia, on the private beaches.

#### THE PLACES TO BE

19. (U) All restaurants in Saudi Arabia are segregated by sex, but if a woman is present then men may enter the family section. The Java Coffee shop and restaurant is a popular place amongst the young and restless. Here in Jeddah groups of men and women go together and are left largely unbothered. There are social constraints for women to engage in such activities, and the traditional would never allow themselves to be seen in such a compromising position. Were someone to witness them eating or drinking coffee with a man who is not a relative, it could mean big trouble. Around Jeddah, there are many places for curious men and women to go, such as restaurants and coffee houses, but the men must/must have at least one woman with them in order to gain entrance into the family section, at which point they may speak freely. In Riyadh, where the Mutawa are much more prevalent, such behavior as has been described above, could get you into a bind...but not in Jeddah. Al-hamdulillah!

Gfoeller